

**APOCALYPSE NOW, MAYBE LATER, OR EVEN SOONER: THE BLISS OF  
PREDICTION**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis begins with an explanation of my curiosity with anxiety, an interest that I have not only revisited from my previous practice, but is elemental to my lived reality. During the Masters candidacy at Emily Carr University of Art and Design, I have come to regard anxiety, and its counterpart panic, as a universal phenomenon as much as an individual affliction. The penchant for speculative anxiety – the tendency to anticipate doom – I argue, has been a reality of Western civilization since the first raindrops fell on Noah's holy construction. However, my thesis posits that this anxiety has an enhanced status in post-modern culture. The volatile reality of human civilization, as well as my own feelings of insecurity about the future, emanate from the trope of dystopian futures, popular depictions of apocalypse and post-apocalypses, as well as mediated news sources. I borrow and reprocess each of these in order to prepare for surviving any form of inexorable demise.

Throughout the thesis, a number of works are analyzed, focusing on those that are quintessential to my current practice. Beginning with a description of dystopian references that have inspired my anxiety, I go on to describe ways in which speculative anxiety influences the construction and material reality of my work. The thesis distinguishes the utilitarian objects I make from dominant methods of manufacture, suggesting that their alterity of form, function, and fabrication enacts a *dissensus* -- introducing my own narrative and anxious state to the function of the pieces. The result of my artistic process thus far has consisted of material plans, models and sculptural objects. I conclude by describing forthcoming projects that are more performative by nature, and explain how they function as an additional level of immersion into my neurotic condition.



# APOCALYPSE NOW, MAYBE LATER OR EVEN SOONER: THE BLISS OF PREDICTION

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## **PREFACE**

*Dear Reader,*

*Please do accept my apology that I am not yet able to provide a comprehensive instructional manual for how to prepare for our imminent end. I cannot say for certain what will be necessary, as the possibilities continue to broaden, and of course, I will be securing my own preparations first and foremost.*

*All my best,*

*KS*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1978, Steven King's saga The Stand was published. The novel follows a government designed super-influenza virus that, when accidentally released, violently kills 99.4% of the human population. The germ warfare, colloquially named *Captain Trips*, leaves the morals of good or evil to be questioned by the remaining .06% of the human population. The few surviving souls divide, drawn in equal portions to their spiritual poles, headed by the good Christian leader residing in Alabama, and the devil himself in Nevada. King's modern day version of the Biblical book of Revelations was finally adapted into a television mini-series in 1994. The credits for the first of four installments in the series, titled "The Plague,"<sup>1</sup> is a graphic showcase of bodies at the government compound where the germ-warfare was made and accidentally leaked. In a concentrated dose, the virus kills within moments, and the credits are a montage of decaying bodies, eerily caught in their conventional work poses, eternally frozen by the man-made flu. The credits to this adaptation of King's religious saga are scored by an upbeat and rather ironic song by Blue Oyster Cult "Don't Fear the Reaper." In the same year as the release of the mini-series, my older brother brought home the entire series on box-cassette for the family to enjoy. At precisely the eleven-minute mark, with the credits coming to a close, I experienced my first panic attack. The combination of implied mass-catastrophe, an excitable imagination and a religious upbringing, in conjunction with my tender age, resulted in an inconsolable episode of anxiety. My mother spent nearly three hours calming me, placating my empathy for the characters, explaining that neither me, nor my friends, were going to 'die and go to hell.'

This early experience -- my first grasp of the nature of anxiety<sup>2</sup> -- had a profound impact. Early in art school my work began to respond to the supposed affliction of anxiety, which as precursor, I defined as an inordinate unease with a given situation or environment. In its cognitive form<sup>3</sup> I was subscribing to feelings of frustration, listlessness and irrational fear. Early

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<sup>1</sup> Mick Garris, director, *The Stand*, 1994.

The series is divided into four parts, based on the book and the script written by King. The first part is titled "The Plague" and takes place as a superflu (influenza) virus ravages the human race. In it, King outlines the total breakdown and destruction of society through widespread violence, the failure of martial law, and eventually the death of virtually the entire population.

<sup>2</sup> John Voyer, Janet Gould, and David Ford, "Systemic Creation of Organizational Anxiety," *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science* 33 (December 1997, 471 - 489), p.472.

Behavioural psychologists on the topic of organized anxiety propose that "[m]any people experience anxiety, an intense feeling of apprehension and fear, in circumstances where these emotions are warranted, such as acute physical danger. However, since the dawn of psychology and psychotherapy, psychoanalytic scholars have suggested that anxiety, at an unconscious level, is virtually endemic to the human condition."

<sup>3</sup> I had not yet acknowledged the physiological symptoms of anxiety in my artwork.

on, my projects began to adhere to this anxious psycholosis of the maker: in an early work I organized a collection of the brush bristles that had flawed my canvases while painting. Many feeble attempts at making hyper-clean and precise paintings led to the discernment of bristles falling from my student grade brushes and blemishing the paint. Abandoning the paintings that I set out to make, I began to experiment with this, a nuisance perhaps, but a much more candid result of my painting process. Testing the quality of brushes by way of bristle loss, I carefully timed the process in the name of scientific accuracy, rubbing the canvas rigorously with an assortment of brushes, I then meticulously collected the bristles fallen from each, organizing and accounting for them in an archive which I later mounted on the strip of canvas from which the bristles came. This work, named *Differing Qualities of Industrial Latex Brushes* (2005) began my concession to moments of derailment, and skill ineptitude in my process of making.

*Perverse Corridor* (2005), an intaglio copper plate etching of architectural halls and museum plans, was made during my final undergraduate year. It is intended to symbolize the claustrophobia, an overbearing uneasiness, that I would sometimes experience as a result of the institutional environment. This work viusalizes the institution as a maze or labrinth, with several plans layered over top of one another to create a confusing architectural landscape. An *Untitled* sound project from the same year was made up of sounds of the mundane, those typical to the environment around me -- an alarm clock, a fridge running, a siren on the street. I rearranged and manipulated this sound-litter, making it into an unrecognizable ambient sound-scape: a calming drone from daily annoyances. A later series of drawings from 2006, called *Barrels and Buckets* (plate 1), is blotted ink pressed on mylar. This process was based on the research of psychological tests using inkblots. A blot of ink on paper has been an analytical device since 1921 when Hermann Rorschach realized that the young children in the institution in which he worked were all finding different objects in the guessing games they played.<sup>4</sup> This inquiry was my first interest in the idea of the clinical diagnostic of psychological phenomenon. I endeavoured to know the cause of my anxiety. Immediately recognizable was the undeniable fact that each of the plates that I created resembled the one before. The experiment had taught me only that diagnosis is nearly impossible concurrent with testing. The process, dearth of its original intent, did maintain its value as an indicator of failure and of the clumsiness of self-reflection -- a reiteration of themes that had begun to appear in earlier works.

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<sup>4</sup> John E. Exner, *The Rorschach, Basic Foundations and Principles of Interpretation*, Volume 1 (4th ed. Wiley, 2002). The Rorschach inkblot test is a method of psychological evaluation used by psychoanalysts to test the personality and emotions of patients.



Plate 1. *Barrels and Buckets* (2006) 18" by 12," archival ink on mylar

Each of these past works came from a subjective place, where explorations of anxiety were in response to the immediate circumstances, and mostly based on a latent fear of failure, or the nature by which my neuroses had the ability to envelop a given circumstance. Fear and neurosis is displayed in all the before-mentioned works (in respective order): being a newcomer to painting and struggling with skill-inadequacy; feeling anxious and claustrophobic as a student in an often intimidating academic process; general frustration with urban dwelling and longing for tranquility; and attempting a clinical DIY of my condition. Each looks at the reaction, product, or both, of immoderate feelings of fear and unrest that I subjected myself to.

The works that I will discuss throughout this thesis similarly address a personal condition of anxiety, but instead of analyzing its affect on an instantaneous circumstance, my masters work has been an exploration of what I call 'speculative anxiety.' That is, I have become increasingly aware of an 'eventuality of total destruction.'<sup>5</sup> Still very much self-reflective of my existing anxieties, my inspection has broadened to look at an, arguably, more universal apprehension with mortality. I endeavoured to analyze the source of my anxieties to a greater degree, and in doing so, the snake has begun to devour its own tail.

My reason for beginning this thesis with my childhood experience with a cultural fiction that forecasts a problematic future is the rouse that such speculative-fiction has had on my current trajectory. A childhood inundated by science fiction, and through that fiction, the trope of a dystopian<sup>6</sup> future, is partially responsible for my unease with what the future has in store. However, popular literature is not alone accountable as other contributors such as religion and mediated information all conflate into the putative reason for my anxiety. Conscientious of the influence of this disquiet on my art practice, I will herein describe how it is part and parcel to the conception, construction, and representation of my newest work.

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<sup>5</sup>John Armitage and Joanne Roberts. "On the eventuality of total destruction." *City* 11, no. 3 (December 2007, 428-432): p.428

An analysis of the bunker-inspired architecture of Paul Virilio and Claude Parent.

<sup>6</sup> John Stuart Mill, "England and Ireland," Speech to British Parliament, 1868.

The term dystopia was first coined in 1868 when John Stuart Mill gave a speech in British Parliament. Obviously aware of Greek and Latin etymology in the English language, he adapted Sir Saint Thomas More's term *Utopia*. In *Utopia* the prefix 'U' is derived from the Greek 'Eu' which means 'good,' while 'topia' comes from the Greek 'topos' meaning place. It is believed that when Mills changed the prefix to 'dys,' that he did not only imply the opposite of *Utopia*, but the Greek meaning of the prefix being 'ill'; an 'abysmal place.' There can be double meanings here however, as the Latin prefix, 'ou' could be applied, and instead means 'no,' so 'no place,' which points to the alternative allegory that More may have intended, which is that the idealized society that he writes about, with a perfect socio-political system, is an unobtainable fantasy. If *utopia* is looked at as a term to describe an unobtainable entity, then it can be assumed that the more realistic prediction is its opposite. In this sense, the term *dystopia* reads as redundant or contradictory; as there was already an inherent cynicism of the plausibility of the whimsical and carefree Island that More visualized.

## THE *TO DO* SERIES: THE CONSTRUCTION OF SPECULATIVE ANXIETY

*"All responsible writers, to some degree, have become involuntarily criers of doom, because doom is in the wind... in science fiction a writer is not merely inclined to act out the Cassandra role he is absolutely obliged to..." - Philip K. Dick*<sup>1</sup>

The epitaph to this section is the sentiment of Philip K. Dick, a notorious science fiction author, who "came of age, quite literally, with the bomb."<sup>2</sup> His obsession with a nuclear-holocaust led to the writing of several wry and dark projections of our future state, the most popular of which is Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep (which was later adapted into Bladerunner by director Ridley Scott). Dick, like so many authors of his genre, was obsessed with news and progress of war. Most dystopian narratives and speculative fictions, like Dick's, are characteristic of a war-torn society, with moral themes criticizing contemporary political settings. By gleening current events, and projecting their effect on the future, Dick's tales embellish cultural realities.<sup>3</sup>

As iterated in my introduction, this dystopian form was something that was near and dear to my upbringing, having spent nearly every evening watching my father become engrossed by the fantastical heroism of James Tiberius Kirk.<sup>4</sup> It was no wonder that in later years I had an immediate proclivity to speculative fiction in my comparative literature studies. Though fixated on the genre, I was originally weary of the disconnect between the cultural influences of the authors of sci-fi dystopian tales and my own, as the quintessential works were written by male-American authors following the Second World War, and prescribed to a phobia of communist uprising.<sup>5</sup> More recently, however, my inspection of panic and anxiety in contemporary culture has revealed present-day variations of the same concerns that the authors' of the quintessential dystopian works faced.

Certainly the wake caused by 9/11, and the Bush administration's subsequent 'War on Terror' (where the U.S. was determined to "take out seven countries in five years"<sup>6</sup>) signalled a

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<sup>1</sup> Philip K. Dick, quoted in Gregg Rickman, *To the High Castle: Philip K. Dick: A life 1928 - 1962* (Long Beach: Valentine Press, 1989): p. 119.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas M. Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff is Made of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World* (New York: Touchstone of Simon & Schuster, 1998): p.87

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.88

<sup>4</sup> Gene Roddenberry, *Star Trek*, original television series, 1966.

The captain of the Starship Enterprise, played by William Shatner

<sup>5</sup> James Tyner, "Self and space, resistance and discipline: a Foucauldian reading of George Orwell's 1984," *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 1 (March 2004, 129-149): p.138.

<sup>6</sup> General Wesley Clark, quoted in *Where to Invade Next*, edited by Stephen Elliot, (Washington: McSweeney's, 2008): epitaph.



pronounced resurgence of global-warring. This event, ground-shifting as it was, was merely a catalyst for the re-emergence of a conversation that had been ongoing since the Cold War. The development of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, a low-yield nuclear weapon, had been underway since the Tora Bora problem of Al-Queda's impenetrable cave hide outs in Afghanistan, which first took hold in the early 90's. The low-yield nuclear weapon to deal with underground bunkering, commonly called a 'nuclear bunker buster,' was a tactical advancement of the Clinton Administration in 1994, which had high hopes of elaborating on the nuclear-tactics left behind by Reagan.<sup>7</sup> Knowing this, it comes as no surprise that the file was dusted off by Bush's administration in order to revisit the topic of thermo-nuclear technologies for the recent battling in the middle-east.

Fears of further nuclear hubris and global-war, still very much a prevalent concern, come simultaneously with a lexicon of other doomsday scenarios. There are images and cries of apocalyptic-scenarios in almost all of the head-lines of recent months: a global economic crisis,<sup>8</sup> terror in the middle east,<sup>9</sup> the experiments of gravitational and anti-matter-physicists going array,<sup>10</sup> a hodge-podge in itself of environmental crises,<sup>11</sup> genetic engineering and other morally questionable technological advancements, as well as a changing program of possible flu-pandemics.<sup>12</sup> From this one might postulate that the recent Hollywood frenzie over the newest forms of speculative-fiction (for example the cult-favorite Omega Man remake, I am Legend) epitomizes contemporary adaptations of older forms by re-mixing them with contemporary themes (trading zombie-paranoia for germ-warfare). Meaning that my initial presumptions toward speculative fiction, that its form had reached obsolescence in contemporary culture, was far from the truth. Instead it seems that "[u]topianism, social and cultural experimentation, and drastic self-conscious innovation -- symbolic and concrete -- occur in the midst of all major social revolutions of modern times. They occur because of analogy, infection and euphoria."<sup>13</sup> Anxiety-riddled 'doom-crying' can thus recommence.

In addition to the decidedly reinstated relevance of these ostensible forms of speculative fiction, contemporary philosophers have reinforced the bearing that anxiety has on post-modern

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<sup>7</sup> David F. Bell, "Bunker Busting and Bunker Mentalities, or Is It Safe to Be Underground?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 2 (Spring 2008): p.214.

<sup>8</sup> "The plan should be built to last," *Globe and Mail*, February 19, 2009, sec. Business.

<sup>9</sup> "Two sides to every story," *Globe and Mail*, February 11, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> "CERN hits another snag," *Globe and Mail*, February 10, 2009, sec. technology.

<sup>11</sup> "GREEN SCENE," *Globe and Mail*, February 13, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> "Avian Flu: The Next Pandemic?" *CBC News*, May 12, 2008, sec. In Depth.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1991): p. 11.

culture. One of the more popular discourses at the turn of the post-modern era was panic for example. In a publication titled The Panic Encyclopedia, the authors take a special topical interest in the nature of panic, initially setting out their intent as:

“a frenzied scene of post-facts for the *fin-de-millennium* [...] even the alphabet implodes under the twin pressures of the ecstasy of catastrophe and the anxiety of fear[...] Not then an alphabetic listing of empirical facts about the modern condition, but a post-alphabetic description of the actual dissolution of facts into the flash of thermonuclear cultural ‘events’ in the the postmodern situation.”<sup>14</sup>

Throughout, the authors argue that the nature of panic, situated in a specific post-modern circumstance, is evident in dispersed forms -- from ‘Panic Beaches’ to ‘Panic Xanax.’<sup>15</sup> So too does Jean Baudrillard believe anxiety to be the most fundamental of psychological principals of the post-modern state. He goes one-step further in fact, describing nervous psychosis as inherent to the post-modern condition, with rampant ‘schizophrenia’ the result of anxiety over advancing communicative technologies:

“if paranoia was the pathology of organization, of the structuration of a rigid and jealous world; then with communication and information, with the immanent promiscuity of all these networks, with their continual connections, we are now in a new form of schizophrenia. No more hysteria, no more projective paranoia properly speaking, but this state of terror proper to the schizophrenic.”<sup>16</sup>

For Baudrillard, the typical dystopian fear and paranoia of the machine is a present day reality.

No discussion of panic and doomsday speculation would be complete without the mention of the ‘architect, and bunker archaeologist’<sup>17</sup> turned philosopher, Paul Virilio, whose research on war and its resulting architecture led him to believe that “you cannot understand the world of progress without the world of destruction.”<sup>18</sup> Virilio, similar to Baudrillard, believes culture to be “entering the age of the synchronization of collective emotion,” an event he is weary of as a bi-product of “technology’s pursuit of speed in the information war.”<sup>19</sup>

While this by no means provides a comprehensive overview of the discourse of panic and anxiety in contemporary culture, it is intended to function as a general claim for the topic as one that exists in addition to my subjective experiences, reinforcing its relevance as a theme in

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Kroker, Marilouise Kroker, and David Cook, *Panic Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene* (Vhps Distribution, 1989): p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. “The Ecstasy of Communication.” In *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster, (New York: New Press, 2002, 126-134): p. 130

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Geisler, and Pierre Doze, “Rock Around the Bunker.” *Damn*, no.21, (April 2009), p.93

<sup>18</sup> Paul Virilio, quoted in Thomas Geisler, and Pierre Doze, “Rock Around the Bunker.” *Damn*, no.21, (April 2009): p.93

<sup>19</sup> Juris Milestone, “Design as Power: Paul Virilio and the Governmentality of Design Expertise,” *Culture, Theory & Critique* 48, no. 2 (October 2007): p.176.

contemporary art practice. A curiosity in the nature of anxiety is what resulted in the first artwork that I will discuss herein. The project, made up of a compilation of lists, is a catalogue of preparations that I have deemed necessary for survival in the event of a doomsday scenario. Each item on the first list, entitled simply *To Do* (plate 2), is based on tips found in various speculative fictions, and is the conflation between fictional tributes and what I argue are viable present-day anxieties. Written on thin graph paper, the writing for *To Do* is hand-done and scratched out in certain areas. Hurriedly done with uneven spacing between terms and with arrows to point out shared characteristics from one point to another, the haphazard penmanship on non-archival, flimsy, graph paper speaks to a doodle. The work has values of a text piece, but might more closely relate to the class of automated drawing -- entirely dependent on the action and performance occurring during its construction. The surface, 1-cm spaced graph paper, is typical to plan drafting or architectural drawing.

Each item on the *To Do* list was found in a speculative (science) fiction movie and/or book, specifically the speculative sources that forecast a problematic future with bleak and desolate outcomes. The method by which I have catalogued these points can be explained by looking at one in particular: point 13 suggests that I “[s]ave up to get on first trip to outer world colonies.” This point is derived from the film Bladerunner, the cult classic film adapted from Philip K Dick’s Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep. In Dick’s proposed future, set in approximately 2019, the earth has been inflicted with an unknown scourge. Social structure, material culture and aesthetic principals have shifted, and a new emphasis is placed on caring for the few surviving animals left on earth.<sup>20</sup> Bladerunner starts in a futuristic place, filled with neon signs, flying cars, dark skies and constant rain. Within the first minutes of the film, an advertisement for travel to outer world colonies appears. Earth it seems, in this imagined future, has been deemed unliveable, and the *envogue* undertaking is to move on, evacuate. The majority of the human population has left for the outer world colonies, presumably some glistening, fresh, new planets. A floating billboard boasts that the spacecrafts that transport individuals to the outer world colonies are equipped with all the luxuries and comforts of a glamorous cruise. Further along in the plot, we learn that not ‘just anyone’ can jet off to the outer world colonies, that the individual has to be in top health and well-to-do. Point 13 of *To Do* is directed at the viability of pursuing a life(style) of luxury in the event such a future were to arise. As opposed to staying around on the planet with the rest of the scourge, I have opted to

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<sup>20</sup> Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (L.A: Del Rey, 1996)

- ① Get a pet dog, then train him / her to talk
- ② Learn to hem; fish; hunt; cry
- ③ Don't panic
- ④ Warn family
- ⑤ ~~4~~ Add shoulder pads and hockey gear to previously owned jackets
- ⑥ ~~5~~ Join the demin demon
- ⑦ ~~6~~ Outfit a shopping cart
- ⑧ Start digging
- ⑨ Acquire a fast black car - make even faster w rockets
- ⑩ Bore children
- ⑪ Stockpile ~~bag~~ batteries; canned goods; go juice; rockets; bean sprouts; ~~fluorescent~~ fluorescent lights; netting; whiskey; cigarettes!!
- ⑫ Wear more leather
- ⑬ Save up to get on first trip to outer world ~~colonies~~ colonies
- ⑭ Thatch together hollow metal tubes and drift wood
- ⑮ Outfit a contraption capable of converting your urine back to drinkable water

'save up' to get on the first shuttle out. (I am hoping that when it comes right down to it, as the saying goes, 'cash is king.')

Taking precautions in preparation for the possibility of environmental INsustainability (only ten years in our future no less) is admittedly alarmist and reactionary -- certainly a bit anxious -- however the issue of earth's climate and human livability is rooted in perfectly legitimate present-day discourse of environmental crisis. An ominous 'media voice' has declared that our current environmental trajectory will render the earth insupportable in a short matter of time. "Responsible scientists, environmentalists of a variety of ideological stripes and colours, together with a growing number of world leaders and politicians, keep on spreading apocalyptic and dystopian messages about the clear and present danger of pending environmental catastrophes that will be unleashed if we refrain from immediate and determined action."<sup>21</sup> There is clamouring all around -- in the media, in science, popular science, everyday conversation -- whispers of an imminent environmental doom, of which the most particularly disarming are the officials who legitimate the evidence (for if a scientist says it then it must be true). This point, as all of the points on the grocery list of possible requirements, (although first imagined in the 60's) has a contemporary relevance within the context of Earth's human current environmental route.

The formal choices of *To Do* are also informed by a state of nervous anxiety. The shaky handwriting and hurried development of phrases in the text conjure images of artist, scrap of paper in hand, anxiously jotting down notes as each theme appears in the film or book that is watched or read. The choice of the paper is indicative of paranoid anxiety by way of anticipatory preparation: the 1 cm bicubic graph paper characteristic of planning strategem. The way the list is written reflects anxiety-while-writing induced stress and symptoms, which quick gestural marks, and disorderly word choice or syntax are examples of.<sup>22</sup> For instance, point 9 on the list: "Acquire a fast black car made even faster with rockets" (to escape the warring tribes in the post-apocalyptic setting of Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior), would read, if it were more grammatically accurate, "attach rockets to newly acquired fast black car."

In a similar list, *To Do (THX 1138)* (plate 3), many of the formal qualities remain the same, however, I have focused specifically on elements of George Lucas' first feature length

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<sup>21</sup> Erik Swyngedouw, "Impossible "Sustainability and the Post-Political Condition" (Manchester University, 2006): p.3

<sup>22</sup> Peter Salovey, and Matthew D. Haar, "The efficacy of cognitive-behavior therapy and writing process training for alleviating writing anxiety," *Cognitive Therapy and Research* 14, no. 5 (October 1, 1990, 513-526): p.514.

film, THX 1138. In the film, a typical Orwellian landscape is created when ominous causes force the human race to move underground, and civilization is rebuilt with emphasis on consumerism and apathy. The individuals are sedated by government issue psychotropic drugs, they live in white rooms, wear white clothes and are surrounded by futuristic surveillance strategies. Living off of compartmentally freeze-dried food, the inhabitants are completely dependent on alternate reality technologies for daily nuances. One of the necessary preparations that I selected from the film is to [15] “get a libido buffer.” This point refers to an object in the film that ‘takes care’ of the sexual drives of individuals. The ‘libido buffer’ is a large pump that is placed over the mid-section and automates while the individual watches a hologram of a member of the opposite sex dancing naked.<sup>23</sup> This object, used to discourage sexual interaction between the individuals of the subterranean society, maintains the sterile and clean atmosphere -- a disease-free setting that is so important to their survival when living underground. A device that consequently inhibits the spread of disease would be put to good use in a climate made precarious by threats of super-diseases, such as the avian flu, or more recently the similar strain carried by pigs. Thus, in preparation for outlasting a possible pandemic of diseases, it is indeed an invaluable device to have.

Despite their bearing within the context of current troubles, the solution of purchasing a flight to outer-space, or outfitting a masturbatory-mechanism, may not offer a legitimate sense of relief. This is likely because they are not... legitimate. Instead, they are as playful as the fictions that they reference. As with my prior work, where I was aware that my anxiety was not a wholly exclusive trait of my own, and not a trait to be given the utmost somber attention, I am obliged with this work to play with the nature of ‘speculative anxiety’ as a universal trait with questionable efficiency. Where in *Differing Qualities of Industrial Latex Brushes* (2005), I allowed for a tongue-in-cheek concession of my anxieties of skill ineptitude at painting, I intend a similar playfulness in the presentation of my fears of mortality, a fear which harkens back to biblical times of the ‘Righteous Man Noah,’ or even as early as ‘man’ crawling out of the cave and realizing his mortality as he is digested by the hungriest predator.

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<sup>23</sup> George Lucas, Director, *THX 1138*, (DVD re-release) 2004.



1. Train myself to handle radio-active materials  
(and listen to intercom)
2. Fill ~~a wall~~ walls of a room with state  
of the art televisions from before 1982.
3. Shave head.
4. Get white cap so that my noggin' doesn't  
get cold.
5. Wear giant headphones and speaker
6. Get a comfy pair of walking shoes - or an electric  
car
7. Make friends with the giant metallic peace-keepers
8. Buy and sell coloured blocks - mostly primary colours, but shapes  
of all size and dimension
9. Stock freeze-dried t.v. dinners
10. Spend at least 10 mins. of a scheduled day in a  
tanning apparatus (to avoid depression).  
↳ (Vitamin D. yo)
11. Paint my tunnel/apartment all white → don't get  
dirty.
12. Ignore ~~roommate~~ (roommate)? (lover)?
13. Take escalator / 4 red tablets now, and 2 later
14. Call 348 844. or the department of biological flow  
↳ if feeling not properly sedated  
- don't get caught drug evading
15. Use ~~libido~~ - buffer regularly / visit gm and say a little prayer  
↳ while watching hologram of exotics
16. Substitute interval for vetrasene to feel again
17. Consume, excellent, but be more specific - ~~missing it~~  
~~state.~~

Plate 3. To Do (THX 1138) (2009), ink, highlighter, on graph paper

A recent exhibition at the Royal Academy of London took as its theme a similar notion of play with doomsday anxiety. In an introductory essay for the exhibition *Apocalypse*, Norman Rosenthal, the exhibition secretary, admits that:

“[w]hether we like it or not, the coming of the twenty-first century -- two thousand years after the birth of Christ, whose existence modified our culture and perception of time in such a startling way -- is a subliminally apocalyptic moment. How are younger artists today reflecting the inevitable contemporary abyss? In what new ways are they accepting and describing contemporary realities that suggest the uncertain and insecure future that has always existed for humankind? Are there also grounds for optimism? For artists are surely here to assert life and its overwhelming value as well as to commemorate the inevitability of death.”<sup>24</sup>

While Rosenthal locates curiosity with the apocalypse within the very specific temporal and cultural framework of Christianity in the millenium, he admits that an ‘insecure future’ is a recurrent anxiety for humans. The show *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*, topically addressed the speculative anxiety of contemporary art makers at the turn of the century, by showcasing the varying degrees of which contemporary cultural occurrences can be construed as apocalyptic, including a vast array of pieces that signify simultaneously horror and beauty (given the proper creative spin). The works in the show speak for a range of fabrication -- the kitsch creations of Jeff Koons juxtaposed with the abject sculpture of Jake and Dinos Chapman -- who often include in their themes a mockery of the notion of death. The reason, according to Rosenthal, is the ineluctable appetite for younger artists to find ‘optimism’ despite bleak outlooks or malingering fears.

With similar incentives, I cannot take full credit for the jest of *To Do*’s items, their playful quality is, in fact, embedded in the narrative forms from which the preparations are derived: ripe with the over-embellishment typical of dystopian form.<sup>25</sup> To draw an example from one of the narratives that I reference: in the *Mad Max* films, a battle over dwindling natural oil reserves causes the cataclysmic war and death of the majority of the human population (the realization that oil was a depleting resource was as prevalent a topic in the 80s, when the films were made, as it is now). However, when the men in power in *Mad Max* become so obsessed with oil that they start to cannibalize and destroy each other, the resulting landscape is somewhat fanciful. Protective hockey equipment and ass-less chaps are dapper attire for the characters chasing and warring in their fast cars and motorcycles over the remaining bits of fuel. As the “art form

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Rosenthal, and Michael Archer, *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2000) p.17.

<sup>25</sup> James Tyner, “Self and space, resistance and discipline: a Foucauldian reading of George Orwell's 1984,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 5, no. 1 (March 2004, 129-149): p.147.



best adapted to telling the lies we like to hear and to pretend we believe”<sup>26</sup> there is an inevitability to the parody that surfaces in appropriating from these forms.

Each list, both *To Do* and *To Do (THX 1138)*, are inventories of preparations. These preparations are based on elements of dystopian narratives and as such, incorporate the over-embellishment and absurdity of these narratives. The points on these lists, though nonsensical, are embedded in formal realities that are part and parcel to a contemporary state of panic. The “To Do” series, having shown the source material and reasons for the conception of my speculative anxiety can open the conversation to works where my anxiety is further rendered through material construction and representation.

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<sup>26</sup> Thomas M. Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff is Made of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World* (New York: Touchstone of Simon & Schuster, 1998): p.15.

## **GROW OP AND TANNING APPARATUS: THE MATERIAL MAKE-UP OF ADVANCING STAGES OF PREDICTIVE PARANOIA**

*"It crackles through the wires and the air, and scintillates from every sign -- it's the most ancient of the postmodern novelties: panic polytheism, the world religion beamed out from all the sites of post-civilization." - "Panic Ads," from the Panic Encyclopedia<sup>1</sup>*

This past year there was a great deal of discussion about a global food shortage. One article in particular began with 'Cassandra' crying "a new crisis is emerging, a global food catastrophe that will reach further and be more crippling than anything the world has ever seen."<sup>2</sup> Beyond the startling frontline the article goes on to affirm, complete with numbers, that the proposed food shortage is the result of a growing number of middle-income families around the world who want to eat as middle-income families usually do -- that is, there would be an increasing demand for meat and dairy, and in turn more grain feed in the mouths of cows over those of humans. As an ultimate outcome, those who rely on grain as a main dietary necessity -- often times the cattle ranchers and farmers -- go hungry. And thus the system begins to fail.

In the event that this scientifically supported prediction becomes a reality... I intend to be prepared. In one of the more galling literary post-apocalyptic narratives, The Road by Cormac McCarthy, the reader finds gory and detailed accounts of the lengths individuals go to when faced with starvation (eating babies). So then, in order to avoid resorting to cannibalism, or other post-apocalyptic alternatives (canned dog food to quell hunger<sup>3</sup>) I have instead endeavoured to construct a nutritional growth device. The project, called *Grow Op*, is an ongoing experiment at growing bean sprouts. My research of the ideal food source for post-cataclysmic survival led me to bean sprouts because of their remarkable nutritional value and ease of growth. Sprouts are embryonic plants, similar in nutritional value to the human placenta and, as such, have all the necessary nutrients for human survival. Sprouts also do not require soil to flourish. Through experimentation I have been attempting to find the ideal apparatus that encourages maximum growth yields with minimum resource conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Kroker, Marilouise Kroker, and David Cook, *Panic Encyclopedia: The Definitive Guide to the Postmodern Scene* (Vhps Distribution, 1989) p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Alla McMullen, "Forget Oil, the New Global Crisis is food." *Financial Post*, January 7, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> George Miller, Director, *The Road Warrior*, 1981.



Plate 4. *Grow Op* (2008), 38" by 40", mixed media



Plate 5. *Grow Op Harvest* (2008), 60" by 6", baggies and sprout growth

The *Grow Op* device pictured in plate 4 was my first attempt at creating a sprout-growing contraption. Its main impetus is to accommodate photosynthesis without the resource of natural light.<sup>4</sup> Fashioned mostly from found materials, it is a hurriedly constructed object, with wooden arms that teeter precariously in a styrofoam base, the form in which the bean sprouts grow is a piece of vacuum formed plastic with small holes punched across the bottom. The water reservoir tray is also formed plastic (which I later discovered was too flimsy for this purpose). Sold specifically for aquarium and plant growth, the household fluorescent bulb emits an optimal range of UV for the process of photosynthesis. The base is covered with reflective foil mac tac so that the light source can further carpet the sprouting beans. Having ordered an assortment pack of seeds, I kept tabs along the side and carefully documented what conditions worked best for each specific genus. The result of this botanical experiment was carefully documented by the collection of 'greening' in individual ziploc bags, shown here in plate 5, and titled *Harvest*.

Not fully satisfied with the excess amount of fresh water consumed through this preliminary venture, I created another *Grow Op* that was a larger scale installation designed with consideration for water recycling (plate 6). Mounting the lights and growing containers on the wall, I rigged up a siphon pump and vinyl tubing for precision irrigation of the sprouts in each of the tupperware containers. I then placed a collection tray underneath each container to catch water drips and return the un-used water into the reservoir tank.

Each of the *Grow Op* experiments is founded on fear of the global food shortage taking hold and escalating in severity, but, for clarification, is not intended to be a social gesture. Indeed, it is based on what could become a global concern, but is a neurotic construction which is more selfish than altruistic. In actual fact, a device for growing bean sprouts in a controlled environment is available for the low-price of \$129.95 at a number of common hardware stores. It is made of a grow light, a container to place the seeds, an irrigation system on a precision timer, all encased in a stylish space-age looking pod.<sup>5</sup> But despite the availability of this object (not to mention its relatively modest price for the fine quality) I have decided to construct a 'do it yourself' version in order to sufficiently prepare for a perceived eventuality.

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<sup>4</sup> In many dystopian and post-apocalyptic narratives the sun has been destroyed or its effect can no longer be felt on the earth's surface. In the film the *Matrix*, for example, humans have blown up the sun to conquer the solar-fed machines. In the *Road*, by Cormac McCarthy, a cloud of dust, from nuclear winter or a comet's impact, permanently blocks the sun's rays.

<sup>5</sup> "AeroGrow International, Inc.." <http://www.aerogrow.com/>.





Plate 6. *Grow Op (March Study)* (2009), approx. 5' by 6,' installation from mixed media

My re-envisioning of an object that could otherwise be easily purchased through the consumer market is an intentional act. Another Canadian artist, Donald Lawrence, has used similar tactics in his practice. His *Romantic Commodities* series in 1993 was a collection of objects that could have been found in a hardware store, such as survival kits and outdoor adventure gear, objects that are designed for those urbanites looking to escape to nature, but will only do so with implements mechanically made and mass-produced. His alternative devices were cast and hand-constructed to resemble their mass-produced counterparts, but integrated distinct ideas of romance and contemplation of nature, with unmistakable alterations in dimensionality and painstaking labour involved in their construction (plate 7).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Katy McCormick, "Accumulations of Desire," In *Donald Lawrence: The Underwater Pinhole Photography Project* (Canada: Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, et al, 2002) p. 7



Plate 7. Donald Lawrence *Storm Kit* (1992) at the Calgary Stride Gallery

In an exhibition catalogue for one of Lawrence's later works, *The Under Water Pinhole Photography Project*, the author speculates on his methods of construction, saying that:

"[by] [t]urning exchange value on its ear, [Lawrence] steps back into a pre-industrial mode by recasting mass produced materials within a system designed for his own specific ends. Though adapted from industrial materials, the cameras and kayak are assembled or altered to the degree that they become one-of-a-kind constructions, curious objects that bear the hand of the artist and the marks of use. Thus, designed for use and not for exchange, Lawrence's project functions as both real and symbolic production."<sup>7</sup>

Lawrence's notion of alternative, romanticized ideas of fabrication, using the assembly of the object to apply an unconventional narrative and a new way of framing an otherwise existing object, in addition to the similar thematic reference of survival, makes his work a appropriate reference in comparison to the 'do it yourself' construction of my *Grow Op*. I, too, am re-evaluating the design of an object to point to an alternative context -- the speculative anxiety that calls for a device for growing sprouts in the event of a global-famine. The existing device for growing sprouts, after all, is not made to accomodate a post-cataclysmic scenario of global starvation, it is simply a device of convenience. To point to this alternative purpose, I have subsumed a theme often found in post-apocalyptic fictions...

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p.6

Scavenging is a popular theme in many post-apocalyptic narratives where a global crisis leaves individuals struggling post-industry. In The Road, the main character and his son travel the country with a shopping cart hurriedly outfitted with rear view mirrors to see lurking enemies. In the film Waterworld, the earth's ice caps have melted, and the small surviving population have adapted by scavenging the few remnants and detritus that floats to the surface from a previous time.<sup>8</sup> In each, technological advancement as we know it has come to a halt, and the survivors live a life where the system has shifted from that of consumption to that of collecting and preserving. Clothes are tattered, trade in survival materials is the new currency, and as Kevin Costner so astutely puts it within the first few minutes of the film, "Nothing is free in Waterworld"<sup>9</sup> - implying that generosity, community, and altruism disappeared with the submerged civilization.

Given that the "Grow Op" device is a mock up in preparation for an apocalyptic scenario (vehement famine), I have applied similar post-apocalyptic motifs to its construction. Or more accurately, I have been practicing for what a given scenario may call for and what scavenging techniques may be inexorable. Having accounted for the materials that will be of great importance from this bygone industrial civilization -- fluorescent lights in case of an absence of sunlight, which in turn would require battery or generator operation, and a stock-pile of sprouting seeds -- the remainder, the wood, the plastics, the reflective mac-tac, any other construction materials, can be easily scavenged from recycled materials.

This logic, while fitting, cannot alone account for why I have decided to create my own device; for I could still recontextualize the ready-made device to outfit it for my purposes. The calculated act of creating my own ad hoc version points to a further echelon of anxiety in its preparation, a removal or isolation from the dominant modes of production. In constructing *Grow Op* at a time and juncture before any galling post-global-starvation-endemic where I might have to scavenge materials, my pieces, similar to Donald Lawrence's work, are being "designed for use and not for exchange."<sup>10</sup> An act alone which insinuates a removal, or dissidence from the system of manufacture in question. Another artist, similarly interested in the construction of devices of utility, but those detached from any predominant form, is Thomas Hirschhorn.

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Reynolds, and Kevin Costner, Directors, *Waterworld*, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Katy McCormick, "Accumulations of Desire," In *Donald Lawrence: The Underwater Pinhole Photography Project* (Canada: Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography, et al, 2002) p. 7

Hirschhorn uses ephemeral and thrown together materials to construct installations in “critique of the mechanisms of display.”<sup>11</sup> Hirschhorn’s methodology is typical of his *Caveman*<sup>12</sup>, which is a precarious exhibition space created out of cardboard and packing tape. In creating auxiliary atmospheres Hirschhorn has been regarded as challenger of the established reality, or more figuratively, a ‘hyperborean subject’:

[t]he hyperborean subject inhabits the universe of facts without assimilating itself, like the hypochondriac subject, to the order of facts. The world of facts is the world of objective unfreedom, the world of determinants, laws, definitions. It is the world that has already been decided, the universe of recognized, official and instituted factual truths -- reality. The hyperborean subject is the subject of a certain denial of reality. It withdraws from the imperatives of the idealism of facts in order to open itself to another world, another order than (established) reality.<sup>13</sup>

This suggests that Hirschhorn, a ‘hyperborean’ being, is negating reality by creating a new method by which to view it. That is, instead of using an established format for exhibition -- the white walls of the traditional gallery space -- Hirschhorn is creating his own vernacular with the cardboard cave. He is creating an alternate reality space for viewing the ‘real’ subjects that he evaluates (in his case both political and philosophical figures) and by doing so jumbles together a new context by which to view the topic. -- and in doing so, creates a new context by which to view reality. This is similar to the scavenging of materials to construct *Grow Op* which speculates an approaching cataclysm, however, acting as a hyperborean subject also implies a deliberate removal from the laws and rules set out in dominant culture. Though aware of these laws, and the realities that each determine, the hyperborean subject is psychologically isolated, from them.

If we were to compare this notion, for a moment, to the *To Do* series, we might flesh out the relationship between the ‘hyperborean’ subject, in terms of defining the psychological state of the maker, and my own methods of creation. With the *To Do* lists, each point is inspired by fact: the global crisis of which I am aware, and reacting to (‘inhibiting the universe of facts’). However, my answer to the anxiety created by these facts is in the form of fiction, a function outside of ‘established reality,’ and so a cryptic negation of it. Jacques Ranciere calls the tendency to negate the ‘world of fact,’ creating a form of *dissensus*, which is situated in direct opposition to the hegemonic cultural form, that of *consensus*. Consensus is that which says:

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<sup>11</sup> Marc James Leger, “Thomas Hirschhorn: Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake,” C Magazine, no. 97, Spring 2008: p.42.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Wilson, “Caves of New York - Thomas Hirschhorn's Caveman.” Artforum, February, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Marcus Steinweg, “Worldplay,” in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Utopia, Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress*, 24 – 51 (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2005) p. 25.



“we may have conflicting interests, aspirations and values but we are obligated nonetheless to agree that the given is given, and that we have to look at it just as it is. This agreement draws a clear cut separation between what is given and what is not, what is in and what is out, what is real and what is fictional or ideological or utopian.”<sup>14</sup>

In the context of *Grow Op*, the object of *consensus* is the established and agreed upon method by which to easily grow bean sprouts -- the ‘Aerogarden’ being an example. *Dissensus* is then negating that reality both by creating my own alternative device, but also in fictionalizing its necessary uses. Ranciere explains that the act of creating an object of *dissensus* is “when the monopoly of reality is questioned, when there is a dispute on what is given, on the name that can be given, and the sense that can be made of it.”<sup>15</sup> In this work, I am challenging the material fabrication of a growing device. That is, questioning the methods of mechanical fabrication, questioning the regulatory uses of materials, and recombining these to make sense of an object suited to my purposes -- at once a object of function and a challenge of fixed edicts. In doing this, I conflate an alternative reality (post-apocalyptic starvation) to imbue the making of a seclusionist’s survival device. The construction of *Grow Op* is in essence a paranoid delusion.

A work that functions in much the same way in its material construction is the piece that I made for the Emily Carr 2009 Graduate exhibition, *Always/Almost. Tanning Apparatus (In Preparation for THX 1138)* is inspired by an object found in the film *THX 1138*.<sup>16</sup> A particular scene in the film follows the main character, THX, as he enters a small chamber completely filled with indigo light. The shot remains on him with only the subtle buzzing of the fluorescents which he stands, eyes closed, bald headed and white robed, meditating under. Recalling the oddity of all the characters in the film having tanned skin and freckles despite living in underground caves, it soon became clear that the room THX was standing in was a tanning booth -- a UV supplement in the absence of sunlight. In response to this scene, I began to consider our dependency on the sun, without which we would be incapable of producing the Vitamin D required for the body to absorb calcium. Of course, without calcium our bones would crumble and dental hygiene would disintegrate, not to mention the proven psychological implications of going without.<sup>17</sup> In any number of plausible catastrophes where our interaction

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<sup>14</sup> Jacques Ranciere “What Makes Images Unacceptable” (presentation at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, February 28, 2008)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> George Lucas, Director, *THX 1138*, 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Michael F. Holick, M.D., Ph.D. “Vitamin D Deficiency,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Vol. 357, no. 3 (July 19, 2007, 266- 281): p.267.

with the sun is jeopardized (nuclear winter, asteroid collision, or germ warfare) we would require a synthetic replacement.

As for tanning beds and other tanning apparatus, there certainly exist monopolies on that reality. The local distributor *Cantan*, for example, sells tanning beds and booths which look of space-age descent and appeal to those looking for the ‘fresh off the beach glow.’<sup>18</sup> However, *Tanning Apparatus (In Preparation for THX 1138)*, similar to *Grow Op*, is constructed with dissidence to the dominant methods of manufacturing. While of comparable utility to the tanning appliances of today’s market, my apparatus has a much less manufactured construction than the mass-produced varietal. Made with found wood, scavenged plastics, and amateur electrical skills, it dictates a similar sense of post-apocalyptic scavenging for materials as with *Grow Op*. This object is for my own individualistic interest, which does not require consideration of refined craftsmanship, or appeal to a design quality that would make the object desirable to a consumer market. It is made by someone who does not adhere to the rules of manufacture that are enforced through existing industrial modes.

A recent exhibition at the New Museum in New York, surveyed a sculptural form with similarities to my own. The exhibition, titled *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st Century*, was a survey of practitioners of assemblage sculptures. In his catalogue entry, curator Massimiliano Gioni notes that “these new objects clearly defy the traditional limits of sculptural form as they extend to incorporate found materials, artificial objects, second-hand images or, more simply, waste.”<sup>19</sup> While touted throughout the catalogue as a contemporary practice, the show’s curators admit that the method of sculptural assemblage pays homage to the assemblage forms of Rauschenberg’s *Combines*<sup>20</sup> as well as the material sensibility of *Arte Povera*.<sup>21</sup> What unites all of the artists in the large group show is the shared disregard for preciousness. Another of the show’s curators, Richard Flood points out that “[o]ur time demands the anti-masterpiece. Things that are cobbled together, pushed and prodded into a

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<sup>18</sup> “CanTan Sun Systems Ltd.” [www.cantan.com](http://www.cantan.com), 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Massimiliano Gioni, “Ask the Dust.” In *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st century*, (New York: Phaidon Press, 2007, 64- 76): p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg, Art and Life*, (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1990)

Rauschenberg’s *Combines* come from a period mid-career, approximately 1954–1964, and break down the traditional separations between painting and sculpture, inventing new uses of multi-media in practice.

<sup>21</sup> Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, ed. *Arte Povera. Themes and movements*, (London [England]: Phaidon Press, 1999). A movement in the 60s in Italy where artist’s attacked established conventions, power structures and market place. The original text and exhibitions were organized by Germano Celant, and were characterized by a group of young Italian artists engaged with unconventional materials and style.

state of suspended animation feel right [...] Works that appear hurled into uncomfortable, anxious relationships run parallel to life.”<sup>22</sup>

With analagous sentiment to that of the *Unmonumental* show, I have avoided designing a marketable object (be it of design or of even a polished sculptural form). With patched together found wood, and exposed wiring, *Tanning Apparatus (In Preparation of THX 1138)* points to a tenuous discomfort, an ‘anxious relationship’ with the world of reality. An urgency in its construction shows that the sentiment of the maker, that of a seclusionist, ‘hyperborean’ being, while making the anti-masterpiece shows a dissidence of hegemonic culture.

The system of manufacture from which I am dissenting, is simultaneously responsible, to a degree, for perpuating anxiety through the unyielding persuit of technological advancement to answer to a ‘market.’ In turn, it is a system entrenched in waste by-product, which is the result of our tenuous state of environemental crisis. By way of detaching myself from the consumer system, through my own brand of invention and recycling, I protest concurrently the consumer culture that has gotten us here, and the *consensus* that keeps us entrenched through a “synchronization of collective emotion.”<sup>23</sup> A culture unable to escape the throes of neo-liberal consumerism. This protest which articulates a disapproval of the same commercial culture that is responsible for our crisis, adheres to a format of critique similar to the dystopian authors that I have previously mentioned, who often conveyed, in their post-war analyses, fear and apprehension of what the aftermath of the industrial revolution might mean.<sup>24</sup> Bringing the source and conception of these projects in full circle to their production. Once again, ‘the snake begins to eat its own tail.’

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Flood “Not About Mel Gibson.” In *Unmonumental: The Object in the 21st century*, (Phaidon Press Inc., 2007, 10-13): p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Virilio, *City of Panic*, (New York, 2005): p.39.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas M. Disch, *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998): p.68.

## CONCLUSION: ENACTING SPECULATIVE ANXIETY

By way of conclusion, I will describe two forthcoming works that show a continuing interest in the themes addressed herein, but which focus more on the performative gesture of my anxiety rather than object-based conclusions.

The first event I propose is a post-graduate collaborative project with my Grandmother in rural New Brunswick. Beginning an exploration in event-based work and skill development, the project will elaborate on my object based practice. Similar to my previous samples this project will respond to an awareness of current events through a 'Cassandra-crying,' or paranoid over-preparedness. The source of anxiety for this particular project is the global economic crisis and the anxiety perpetuated around its discourse -- a "once in a lifetime credit tsunami."<sup>1</sup> In preparation for the collapse of the capitalist system, I am researching the history of the Great Depression as well as the current impacts of the recession on such institutions as global trade. The objective of this project is to develop a skill set that prepares me for living a lifestyle of seclusion, outside of the current system, were a cataclysmic-economic-downturn to occur.

Spending a month living with my Grandmother in Naashwaak Bridge, New Brunswick (an area of the province that is quite desolate and where the Sansom family was one of the first to settle from Wales) I can develop skills particular to her lifestyle, such as: harvesting, pickling and preserving vegetables; mapping and documenting the best places to find local wild growth such as blueberries and fiddleheads; and creating devices based on popular science methods and made from scavenged objects. At ninety-two, my Grandmother has lived through a time of war and depression, in a setting with very little resources, and as such, has a skill-set of stark contrast to my own (a born and bred urban dweller). In addition to what I will learn through mimesis of this lifestyle, I will research and study in the archival materials that my Grandmother has maintained in her multi-generational family home. These historical anthologies, written letters and newspaper clippings will describe the years during the great depression how it affected the region, most importantly, will be from the subjective viewpoints of my ancestors.

This performance will probe the psychology of the "safe place," and the sentimentality surrounding the notion of 'home,' which is integral to my understanding of how I deal with

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<sup>1</sup> Barrie McKenna, "Greenspan admits 'mistake' on bank regulation," (The Globe and Mail, Finance, October 24, 2009), F7.

anxiety. I will travel to this particular area of New Brunswick (my safe-place) by train, a method of transportation in keeping with my time frame of reference -- the Great Depression. As the statistically proven safest method of cross-country transportation, it is also a travel choice in keeping with the state of speculative anxiety that is propelling the entire project.

The motivation for this performance comes from the *commune* that was popularized in the 1960s, where groups of individuals, adamant about learning to live off the land, were searching for ways to exist without dependency on the hegemonic system.<sup>2</sup> This way of life is a reiteration of Jacques Ranciere's *dissensus*, as the *commune* is 'ideolgoical or utopian'<sup>3</sup> in comparison to mainstream capitalist culture. In mimicking the *commune*, I then enact a *dissensus* from hegemonic culture, similar to *Grow Op* and the other sculptural forms that I have created. However, instead of dissent through material production, my 'dispute on what is given'<sup>4</sup> occurs through the action of living an alternative lifestyle, independent from "the world of determinants, laws, definitions."<sup>5</sup> In order to best do this I am taking cues from activities found in old *Popular Mechanics* publications from the 60s and 70s, as well as items found in *The Whole Earth Catalogue* -- an almanac of projects and resources for those looking for alternative methods of survival characteristic of the *commune*.<sup>6</sup>

Another forth-coming, event-based, project is the use of a local exhibition space to create a centre for research and acquisition of McDonald's Pavillion in Expo '86 -- commonly called the 'McBarge.' The speculative anxiety that this project references is the effects of global warming -- ominous rising sea-levels, which will have a particular effect on harbour-cities such as Vancouver. My answer to this speculative anxiety is the use of the fictional motif found in the post-apocalyptic film Waterworld. The project title, *Nothing Is Free in Waterworld*, is a quote from the post-apocalyptic film, and refers not only to the event of glacier ice caps melting, but also the adaptation and the savvy required for survival. Increasingly interested in not only the physical objects required to survive a cataclysm, but supplementary qualifiers inherent to being prepared -- a sense of home, companionship, comfort, and luxury -- I believe the *McBarge* (plate 8) is an ideal amalgamation of luxury and survival in the event of global flooding. Were

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<sup>2</sup> Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1972)

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Ranciere "What Makes Images Unacceptable" (presentation at the Pacific Northwest College of Art, February 28, 2008)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Marcus Steinweg, "Worldplay," in *Thomas Hirschhorn: Utopia, Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress*, (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2005, p. 24 – 51) p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Warshall, and Stewart Brand, *Original Whole Earth Catalog, Special 30th Anniversary Issue* (Whole Earth, 1998)

Vancouver to be covered with water in the future it would be useful as a house-boat or Ark (with striking similarities to the floating homes depicted in the film), but is also a quintessential example of postmodern utopian architecture, and thus an undervalued commodity.



Plate 8. *McBarge* (North facing shot), photo credit Jeffrey Kilmer, 2008

At the end of the *World Fair* in 1986, many proposals were made for an adaptation of the floating restaurant. These were all rejected and the *McBarge* now rests in the Burrard Inlet, abandoned and rusting. Informed by my conceptual premise, this project will incorporate administrative skills and professional etiquette with personal incentives. Through research I plan to uncover the current ownership, licensing, and leasing of the *McBarge*, as well as what other uses have been proposed and subsequently rejected. Dialogue with other interested members of the community will offer consultation on alternative propositions for the barge's uses. Discussions with supporters and local art patrons, in addition to outlining the importance of the *McBarge* as an example of post-modern architecture in Vancouver's history (drawing reference to Jameson's *Utopianism in Architecture* as well as other references of scholastic rigour), will culminate in the development of a professional and infallible proposal for the *McBarge*'s acquisition.

*Nothing Is Free in Waterworld* will transform the gallery space into an office setting -- a desk with a computer, a printer, and a filing system and corkboard to catalogue all pertinent research and correspondence -- which will indicate the actions taking place even in my absence. Letters written daily to the Barge's stakeholders, pleading for its sale or charitable donation to the local arts community; notes and other pertinent paperwork; email and meeting correspondence; all will be carefully catalogued and displayed as if for a small business in its genesis. The product, similar to that of my pilgrimage for *Dear Grandma*, will be a holistic archive of my actions.

The result of each of these explorations will be an installation similar to Kabakov's *Total Installations*, where not a detail -- from photographs, to train tickets -- will be left out of the exhibition of each. Kabakov's installations often depict a character or persona dealing with psychological isolation, where their removal from reality is indicated through a neurotic collection and attempted "psychoanalytic definition of what dreams are."<sup>7</sup> Thus the installations have a 'sensory vividness' of a dissent from reality, similar to my own enacting of *dissensus*. As described by Kabakov "The main actor in the total installation, the main centre toward which everything is addressed, for which everything is intended is the viewer,"<sup>8</sup> meaning that the installation invites an immersion, or sharing of the character's neuroses through its composite structure. By following a similar format for my installations, both *Dear Grandma* and *Nothing is Free in Waterworld* will immerse the viewer in my panic, and possibly induce a similar call for preparation. Each of these projects, a holistic catalogue of the processes of my anxiety, will incorporate the attributes of lists, drawings, and sculptural objects that I have discussed throughout this thesis. Thus, the installation of these 'total works' will enable me to distribute, share, the cathartic bliss of preparing for one's ultimate doom... whenever it may be.

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<sup>7</sup> Claire Bishop, *Installation Art*. 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2005): p. 16

<sup>8</sup> Ilya Kabakov, quoted in Claire Bishop's *Installation Art*. 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2005): p. 14

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## APPENDIX

Please see attached media documentation -- includes digital versions of visual components in order of appearance, as well as a .pdf file of the thesis proper.